

FRAMING OF DISEASE RISK MESSAGES IN AIRPORT BANNERS

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Abstract: *Communication of disease risk aims to persuade the public to take health preventive measures. The receptivity of the public depends on their knowledge of the disease. However, health risk messages can be framed to heighten awareness of the disease threat. This study examined the framing and persuasiveness of disease risk messages in airport banners produced by the Ministry of Health Malaysia. The banners for Zika, Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease, Ebola Virus Disease, malaria, and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome-Coronavirus Disease were analysed to find out: (1) the messages on severity, susceptibility and cues to action found in airport banners, and (2) appeals to logos, pathos and ethos were used to persuade the public to take health preventive measures. The results showed that the banners are very informative on risk groups, disease symptoms, and recommended actions. However, the logos focus of the messages may not construct the diseases as a public health threat because a restricted group of airline passengers are identified as susceptible to the diseases and symptoms presented are mild. The study showed that pathos or emotional appeal is lacking in the airport banners and this should be considered to increase the persuasiveness of the disease risk communication.*

Keywords: *Disease, Health risk communication, Persuasion, Banner*

Introduction

In the area of message design, some researchers have written about how the framing of health risk messages affects public receptivity or uptake of the risk information (Covello et al., 2001; Kreuter et al., 2007; Marteau & Lerman, 2001; Weinstein, 2003). So far, what is known is that people find it more difficult to understand risk information presented in a numerical format than in narrative form (Kreuter et al., 2007). Further, on the basis of the negative dominance model, Covello et al. (2001) argued that health risk messages should avoid negative words as these undermine trust. In addition, word choice in the assignment of agency has been found to affect perceptions of threat. Researchers such as Chou et al. (2011) have found that the use of passive voice and the generic “you” indicate absence of control with